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Office of the Child Advocate



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New Hampshire Office of the Child Advocate Releases 7th Annual Report

CONCORD, N.H. – New Hampshire Office of the Child Advocate Releases its 2023-2024 Annual Report.

“In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) continued its evaluations and profound systemic impacts,” the Child Advocate Cassandra Sanchez expressed. “This report illustrates the commitment of dedicated Office staff to advocate for micro and macro shifts within the New Hampshire child-serving systems, the prioritization of outreach to ensure the OCA is a known resource by all community stakeholders and constituents, and the unwavering efforts to elevate the voices of the children we serve,” Sanchez continued.

In this reporting year, the OCA received 319 complaints, primarily from the families of system-involved children. There were 2,937 incident reports reviewed, which include events of restraint and seclusion of children in residential placements, as well as missing children, parent and child fatalities, and serious injuries to children. These critical incidents include 12 child fatalities, with roughly a third of these children under the age of one-year-old.

An area of focus the OCA has been monitoring since its inception is the placement of children outside of their homes and the large percentage of those children who are placed in institutional settings. “The OCA spends time traveling to meet with children placed throughout New Hampshire and across the country to ensure they are receiving adequate care and therapeutic treatment, their needs are being met, and there is a plan to transition them back to New Hampshire in a community setting,” Sanchez expressed. “Whenever a child is placed outside of New Hampshire, especially outside of New England, monitoring the placement and seeing the child quickly, if needed, becomes much more challenging.”

Among the OCA’s accomplishments in 2023-2024 is the completion of a *System Review Mapping* (SRM), which utilizes a Safety Science review process that helps create changes at the system level and allows the child welfare agency to learn and grow without shame and judgement. This approach promotes increased accountability and public trust of child welfare agencies, while also cultivating a responsive system that is dedicated to learning and growth. The OCA’s mission remains steadfast in ensuring children and families have access to effective and timely services before abuse, neglect, or unnecessary system involvement occur.

Pursuant to RSA 21-V, the Office of the Child Advocate provides independent oversight of all children’s services provided or arranged for by the State to assure that the best interests of children are being protected.

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